

# HHS Secretary Leavitt Wants Medicare E-Rx Mandate

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U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt has called for mandated electronic prescribing for Medicare patients. At the 2008 HIMSS Conference in Orlando on Feb. 26, he also indicated mandates on use of electronic health records under Medicare are a distinct possibility.

Electronic prescribing can enable physicians to access formulary data at the point of care and prescribe appropriate but less expensive drugs. "The time has come to make the change to e-prescribing," Leavitt said in his keynote address. "We can no longer afford to pay reimbursements for people to prescribe in the most expensive way."

And he added this caveat for provider organizations that have been slow to adopt EHRs: "The day is not long off until we do the same for electronic health records."

Leavitt also acknowledged that payers, including Medicare, must step up and assist physicians in I.T. adoption. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is ramping up a demonstration program under which up to 1,200 small- and medium-sized primary care practices would receive Medicare incentive payments for adopting certified EHRs.

The system for Medicare reimbursement is not sustainable and must be reformed, Leavitt said. "We over-subsidize many of the wrong things and under-support many of the right things." Asked specifically if Medicare will better support telemedicine, he replied, "We need to review how the compensation system rewards I.T. use."

For instance, Leavitt believes Medicare should reimburse physicians for e-mail consultations with patients. "We need to modernize how we compensate."